



Good People of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Katherine Curtis; I have been a life-long peer working to overcome both physical and psychological challenges. I live in New Haven. I pay taxes and I vote. I also am an advocate for my peers.

I am Co-Founder along with my friend, Vered Brandman, of the organization: RIPPLE (Recovery Innovations for Pursuing Peer Leadership and Empowerment). We have spent the past two years fundraising and raising awareness among various communities in Connecticut around the irreplaceable and necessary value of the Regional Mental Health Boards as they currently exist. I, myself, have taken life-improving trainings and provided empowering presentations via their auspices.

Over the past few years, I have spoken with many who have benefitted from the resources offered by the Regional Mental Health Boards. None more telling, I think, than that of my dear friend Vered Brandman.

For years I have listened to Vered tell me of how lost she had been, in and out of hospitalizations and repeated out-patient treatments, thinking herself irredeemably sick and broken until she happened on the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board. Upon discovering SWRMHB, she says she started to change as a person. She went from thinking of herself as a sick person incapable of playing a useful part in society to being invited to become a valuable staff member of SWRMHB itself. With the help of her amazing mentor, Margaret Watt, Vered came to believe in herself and her personal strength. She even became the original coordinator of the mental health resource website for young teens and adults: [TurningPointCT.org](http://TurningPointCT.org). With the encouragement of the Regional Mental Health Boards, Vered developed a strong voice for advocacy for our peers. With her newfound strength, Vered quickly achieved her certification of Recovery Support Specialist (RSS). Vered has repeatedly testified before the legislature and at community round tables. And this year, Vered was voted to and has actually been serving on the Board of Directors of SWRMHB herself! In addition, Vered does educational presentations throughout the state of "In Our Own Voice" sponsored by NAMI. Further she decided to co-create an organization for education and resources for our peers to help them learn how to empower themselves including taking full advantage of the Regional Mental Health Boards and what they offer.

Without the Regional Mental Health Boards, most likely Vered would still be thinking of herself as broken and incapable. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards, Vered

would not have been able to help to empower so many of her peers. Vered is just one person affecting hundreds, thanks to the Regional Mental Health Boards. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards, peers like Vered, would not have the information and resources to make good choices for themselves and their communities.

Connecticut is a better place to live as a result of the support the Regional Mental Health Boards provide. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards as they currently operate, many taxpaying peers will have no access to resources that provide education and opportunities that they desperately need. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards, peers who have the potential of becoming taxpayers may end up being in the care of taxpayers and unable to get the information and education to become independent. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards, Connecticut will be a less viable place to live for taxpayers who happen to have psychological/addiction challenges. Without the Regional Mental Health Boards our peers will suffer and so will Connecticut.

Time and time again the Regional Mental Health Boards have been asked to tighten their belts and work with less. Time and time again they have done so. But there is only so far an organization can survive cuts in funding. The Regional Mental Health Boards have cut as far as it is possible for them to cut and still remain viable and valuable to the people they serve.

Instead of cutting the funding for the Regional Mental Health Boards, Connecticut would benefit greatly in providing **more** funding to **increase their abilities** to serve our peers and the State of Connecticut.

I thank you for this opportunity to share my strong feelings that we **must** continue to fund the Regional Mental Health Boards as they are (and perhaps provide them with a bit more operating budget than they have been struggling under.)

Connecticut will suffer **greatly** without the Regional Mental Health Boards. Please keep the Regional Mental Health Boards in place and continuing to fulfill the dreams of our valuable peer residents.

**Keep** our Connecticut Regional Mental Health Boards GREAT!

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